

2048 – The Rejuvenated State





Michael Oren

2048 THE
REJUVENATED
STATE

Israel 2048
The Toby Press

2048 – *The Rejuvenated State*

First English Edition, 2023

The Toby Press LLC

POB 8531, New Milford, CT 06776–8531, USA

& POB 2455, London W1A 5WY, England

www.tobypress.com

© Israel 2048 R.A, 2023

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

ISBN 978-965-526-352-7, *paperback*

Printed and bound in Israel

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>The Israeli State</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>The Nation-State of the Jewish People</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>The State of the Jews</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>The Sovereign State</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Israel's New Deal</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>All Israelis Are Mutually Responsible</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>The State of the Book</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Judges in Israel</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>The State of Gender Equality</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>In Defense of the Israel Defense Forces</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>A State of Security</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Israel Among the Nations</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>The State of Prosperity and Dignity</i>	<i>57</i>

<i>The Healthy State</i>	63
<i>Yamma, Kedma, Tzafona, vaNegba</i>	67
<i>Land and State</i>	71
<i>The Sustainable State</i>	81
<i>The Democratic State</i>	85
<i>The Righteous State</i>	91
<i>Responsibility, Vision, and Will</i>	95
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	99
<i>Israel 2048 – The Movement</i>	101
<i>About the Author</i>	103

Jerusalem
October 30, 2022

Dear Dr. Michael Oren

Israel 2048 Initiative

I congratulate you and your partners in the *Israel 2048* initiative, which seeks to lay the foundations for the image of the State of Israel toward the second century of its existence, and to shape its contours, in a variety of aspects.

The ambitious and important project you lead is characterized by far-reaching thinking and conation to formulate common denominators for a variety of segments of the Israeli public; not an easy task, and one which is worthy of great respect, and is essential for Israel's multifaceted society. As a country that devoted a significant portion of its first decades primarily to existential and survival issues, there is no doubt that we should wholeheartedly welcome any effort to formulate a long-term vision which will define the contours of Israel.

In laying the foundation to the contours of our identity and our existence, lies the ability to turn our gaze high and far, to rise above the current reality and formulate the components that will define Israel as it enters the second century of its existence. From ancient times, the motif of vision has characterized the Jewish people, the same foresight and anticipation for the future. Many of the words delivered by the prophets of Israel were such in nature or even by name, in which they lay the foundations for a just and moral society, and outlined the chronicles of the end of days. One of the most dramatic of these is the "Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones" in the book of Ezekiel, which describes the resurrection of an almost extinct people and seems to be depicting our own day and age.

Many thinkers throughout the ages, including supporters of the Zionist movement and contemporary ones, have dealt quite a bit with “outline plans” for the Jewish people and the State of Israel, each with his or her own understanding and world view. So even if it would be a little presumptuous to outline a unified and common vision for Israel, the effort to formulate it is essential.

I hope that your initiative will contribute to the creation of a proper and respectful discourse, from which we will produce a collaboration between the different sections of society, despite the differences and disagreements, and that we will stand together, not only in times of crisis but also for our common future.

Godspeed!

Sincerely,
Isaac Herzog
President of Israel

Introduction

The State of Israel represents a historic irony. While its founders aspired to normalize the Jewish people and to create “a state like any other state,” they in fact established the most unique nation in the world. There is no other country remotely like it.

Israel is one of the very few countries never to have known a moment of non-democratic governance, though it has never enjoyed a second of peace. It is the only democracy with a citizen’s army that has repeatedly proven its will and ability to fight. It is the only modern state that invests equally in innovation as it does in faith-based studies, balancing technology and tradition. It is a state with the highest birth rate in the industrialized world, and the only country to expand its original population twenty-fold in seventy years, largely through refugee absorption. Territorially miniscule, more than half of it desert, Israel is a multiracial, multiethnic, multireligious and multilingual country. By all measures, the state should have dissolved long ago, if not from internal divisions then from relentless external threats, yet it not only survives but thrives.

According to any international criteria – per capita GDP, average longevity, citizen satisfaction, artistic creativity, economic growth, universal health care, higher education, environmental protection, military capabilities, free press, effective judiciary, water reclamation, energy export, bilateral diplomatic ties – Israel is miraculous.

But beyond its monumental achievements, Israel is an idea. It is the realization of a 4,000-year-old vision of establishing Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel, of defending, nurturing, and transforming it into a light among nations. It is the product of incalculable sacrifice on the part of the pioneers, the soldiers, the farmers, educators, engineers, and industrialists who forged it, often at the cost of their lives, and of Jewish philanthropists around the world. It is the coin dropped in the *pushke* by a Hebrew school student in New York and the tree planted by a retired bookkeeper in Manchester. Above all, though, Israel is the result of debate.

The sixty years separating the first Zionist settlements in the Land of Israel and Israel's independence in 1948 were characterized by intense discussions about the nature of the future state. Would it be a "normal" country distinguished only by its Jewish majority, or a country whose ideals and institutions are inherently Jewish? Would it be the national home of all Jews everywhere, including the Diaspora, or a state solely of its citizens? Will it be socialist or free market, an autocracy or a democracy, secular or religious? Far from merely rhetorical, these debates helped forge the educational, material, and military foundations from which Israel arose. They envisioned a sovereign homeland in which Jews could practice their faith in freedom and fulfill their national destiny. More than by force of arms, the Jewish state was created through the power of words.

Emerging a mere three years after the murder of one-third of the Jewish people, that state proved to be one of the most resilient in history. It absorbed immigrants in numbers vastly exceeding its original population, created a vibrant democracy, economy,

and artistic culture, and fought off successive attempts to destroy it. Israel did all this not despite the discussions that preceded its establishment, but because of them. Thanks largely to that forethought, the state that many doubted would live to see its first birthday will likely celebrate its hundredth.

Yet, well before that date, Israel faces challenges that threaten much of its success, if not its long-term survival. It is the only state in the world in which more than a quarter of its parliamentarians refuse to sing the national anthem or to salute the flag. The only state with universal conscription in which more than half the population does not serve. Israel, alone among the nation-states, claims to represent a global diaspora and to expect its loyalty but without honoring the religious affiliations of many of its members. And Israel is the world's only nation routinely denied the right to defend itself and even its right to exist.

Meanwhile, the quality of pre-university education in Israel has plummeted as the income gap has grown to rival those of America, Mexico, and Chile. While the Israeli center – Greater Tel Aviv – flourishes, many peripheral communities stagnate. More than twenty percent of the country are Arabs, mostly Muslims, who, despite the social and economic progress of recent decades, cannot fully participate in the Israeli experience. Others belong to minorities – Ethiopians, Mizrachim (Jews from Central and Middle Eastern countries), and Druze – which often feel disenfranchised.

Israel suffers from severe brain drain, the emigration of both individuals and knowledge, and is outsourcing its most valuable asset, the Israeli mind, to foreign companies. State institutions in Israel suffer from a widespread credibility crisis, with the courts and police no longer fully respected, and politicians viewed as ineffective at best and, at worse, corrupt. Situated in a land holy to over half of humanity, Israel is subjected to an unparalleled scrutiny; its slightest misstep makes headlines. And while Israel is not the

only country in the world to rule over another people, that control potentially endangers Israel's identity as a Jewish, democratic, and internationally respected state.

The coming years will decide whether Israel can overcome these massive challenges, whether the Jewish state was merely an inspired but ephemeral project. Will Israel remain as deeply rooted as Egypt, Russia, and Japan, or it will be relegated to history's long list of transient countries, along with Yugoslavia, Tripolitania, and the Soviet Union? These are among the most pressing long-range questions confronting Israeli leaders today. And yet, due to their daily demands, to fear of controversy, or simply a lack of imagination, these leaders rarely articulate a vision of Israel's future.

What should Israel look like on its one hundredth birthday? How should Israeli society be reorganized to assure equal opportunity for individuals and prosperity for all? What must be the state's relationship with its citizens, Arab and Jewish alike, as well as with its army, its national institutions, and the Diaspora? Which policies must Israel adopt to position itself influentially in international affairs and preserve its technological edge? How, moreover, can Israel grow into a more just, moral, and ultimately more Jewish state?

These are the questions which we must be addressing now, in the twenty-five years before Israel's centennial. As in the pre-state period, we must encourage debate and initiate conversations about our future, especially among young people. We must tap into the same grit and creativity that made Israel the miracle that it is while eschewing the extreme shortsightedness that has come to characterize Israeli decision-making and the deepening popular indifference to tomorrow. Unlike the decades before 1948, though, when planning was often theoretical and abstract, those preceding 2048 must be aimed at attaining concrete goals. Defining those objectives and proposing the realistic means for achieving them is the purpose of *2048 – The Rejuvenated State*.

The initiative originated in the Prime Minister's Office where I served as Deputy Minister (2016–2019) and proposed establishing a state commission to examine Israel's future. Unfortunately, fearing the controversial nature of some of the panels' findings, the office ultimately balked. Nevertheless, together with former Jewish Agency Chairman Natan Sharansky, I convened a forum on Israel-Diaspora relations at the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. But the need for a more comprehensive discussion of Israel's long-term goals remained acute, as evidenced by the four elections of 2019–2021 and the agonizing Coronavirus crisis. Israel was shown to be utterly unprepared politically, legally, logistically for the monumental challenges of today, much less those of tomorrow.

2048 – The Rejuvenated State aims to fill that gaping vacuum. More important than convincing Israelis of all its analyses and recommendations, it seeks to engage them in a conversation which is tragically not taking place but must begin at once. Though predicated on the belief that a Jewish people should and does exist and possesses the right to self-determination in our ancestral homeland, it is not a philosophical exercise. It does not strive to define the nature of the Jewish state but to designate the ways in which Israelis can continue living with their contradictions and with greater harmony, prosperity, security, and purpose. It is an examination of the policies Israel needs to adopt in order to ensure its future as a country in which the vast majority of Jews still believe, will be willing to fight for, and want to live. It is designed, ultimately, to spur young Israelis and Diaspora Jews to become activists and establish movements for critical change. *Israel 2048* is a blueprint for an Israel that will not only survive but thrive through its next one hundred years.

Drawing on more than forty years' experience in governance, the military, and foreign service, and with the perspective of an historian who has lived throughout the country and abroad,

2048 – The Rejuvenated State

I will identify the most critical issues that Israelis need to discuss. I will propose the measures which, however difficult, are vital to Israel's fate. This is my vision for *2048 – The Rejuvenated State*.

The Israeli State

Though deeply fractured along religious, ethnic, linguistic, and racial lines, Israeli society nevertheless coheres. The reasons for this are many, not the least of which is the presence of external threats as well as the existence of democratic institutions for mediating disputes. Another source of unity, however, is what is popularly known as Israeliness.

Israeliness describes a set of shared experiences – eating falafel, say, or visiting a health clinic. Israel is also a family country, and love of family is common to all of Israel’s ethnic and religious communities. Yet the definition of Israeliness has also proved malleable. Once focused almost exclusively on the established Ashkenazi elite, Israeliness has come to embrace – and in many ways, prefer – the Mizrachi culture associated with the middle and working class. The Druze and Circassians, once peripheral to the Israeli story, have now been enshrined at its core. Haredim who previously spoke only Yiddish now converse in colloquial Hebrew

while Israeli Arabic has become peppered with Hebrew expressions and slang. Israeliness has the power to penetrate.

We must augment that power. It is Israel's fundamental interest to foster a sense of belonging. This can be achieved through many ways, some of them discussed in greater detail below, while respecting ethnic and religious diversity. They include a national campaign, "I am an Israeli," conducted through school texts, the media, and popular culture, to identify and strengthen those aspects of Israeli life that unite us. It includes inter-community dialogues and projects backed by the state and certified NGOs. It includes truly universal national service and greater representation for minorities in government agencies. And it means broadening the Israeli story to include the maximum number of citizens.

Being the nation-state of the Jewish people and also the state of all of its people is not, as often portrayed, a contradiction. Many nation-states have minorities that are fiercely patriotic. By contrast, the failure to expand and strengthen Israeli identity will weaken the state's ability to defend itself and preserve its technological edge. And it will save Israel from the fate of the crusader kingdoms to which our enemies often compare us, that dissolved into the surrounding cultures. Success means that Israel can not only cohere but remain a model of reconciling diversity with solidarity, a society respectful of differences but united around an inclusive Israeliness.

The Nation-State of the Jewish People

In 2018, the Knesset passed a bill defining Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. Critics of the law, both in Israel and abroad, condemned it as a racist act that denied national rights to non-Jewish Israelis and downgraded the official status of Arabic. Adding a line guaranteeing the equality and civil rights of all Israelis would not have weakened the law but, even without such a reference, it could not be called racist. It was, rather, a tautological law reiterating the obvious. Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, a country which grants the right of self-determination solely to Jews. Together with the great number of laws establishing Israel as a democracy, the nation-state law filled a lacuna by reaffirming Israel's Jewish identity as well.

No, the main fault of the law was not its contents but rather Israel's failure to live up to them. The same state that defines itself as

the nation-state of the Jewish people not only in Israel but world-wide does not recognize the legitimacy of the Judaism practiced by the majority of American Jews. The absurdity – indeed, the obscenity – of the situation was underscored by the aftermath of the massacre of Jewish worshippers in Pittsburgh’s Tree of Life synagogue on October 18, 2018, six months after the bill’s passage. While expressing solidarity with the victims, several Israeli ministers and the Chief Rabbinate refused to call the Tree of Life a synagogue. The place where Jews were killed while praying as Jews had, in the words of the Jewish nation-state, merely “a profound Jewish flavor.”

The affront was compounded by ingratitude. Contributions and investments from Diaspora Jews account for some 6.5% of Israel’s annual GDP – roughly equivalent to its defense budget – and have contributed massively to building Israel’s educational, medical, cultural, and financial infrastructure. The names of Diaspora, and especially American, philanthropists adorn everything from schools to hospitals and ambulances in Israel to the recreational facilities on IDF bases. There are thirty-four Jewish Members of Congress – the Senate has a minyan – almost all of whom support Israel energetically though none are Orthodox. American Jews are a vital component in the U.S.-Israel alliance.

Why, then, would Israel risk weakening those bonds? Why, with scarcely more Jews in the world today than there were before the Holocaust and increasingly numbers of them assimilating, would the Jewish nation-state alienate itself from so many? The situation is strategically dangerous and morally wrong.

Israel in 2048 must have a radically different relationship with World Jewry. It must redefine Jewish identity in national terms, emphasizing peoplehood over observance. Those who define themselves as members of our people and recognize Israel as our legitimate nation-state must be embraced by Israel as Jews. Israel, in turn, must recognize the legitimacy of the mainstream

Jewish movements. It must institute an independent conversion process, open to both Israeli and Diaspora Jews that includes Jewish studies but which stresses national identity. Israel must cease regarding Diaspora Jewish life as fundamentally illegitimate – *shli-lat hagolah* – just as the Diaspora must recognize Israel as a primary vehicle for Jewish continuity.

With that, Israel must embark on a mission to save the maximum number of Jews from assimilation. A national campaign must be mounted to bring 10,000 young, secular Jews from the Diaspora to Israel each year, to provide them with stipends, jobs, and other incentives and enable them to settle permanently. Eligibility for the program will be determined by answering two basic questions, the first positively and the second in the negative. Is the candidate Jewish and is he or she likely to have Jewish grandchildren?

At the same time, Israelis must be reminded of the moral, economic, and strategic advantages of large-scale aliya. Such a reminder was not necessary in the past and especially during the 1990s when Israel absorbed nearly a million Jews from the former Soviet Bloc. Those olim – perhaps the world's most educated population per capita and educated exclusively at another country's expense – transformed Israeli society and contributed massively to its technological revolution. Three decades later, however, when great numbers of Jews considered leaving France and its rising levels of anti-Semitism, Israel was far less receptive. The country was already too crowded, many Israelis argued, with too few jobs and housing opportunities. As a result, the bulk of French Jews chose to move to Britain, Canada, and the United States instead. Israel missed an historic opportunity. For that reason, as anti-Semitism continues to rise and instability plagues Eastern Europe, Israelis must recall the immense benefits they received from tens of thousands of new immigrants. Future infusions of Jews from the world over will make Israel stronger, wealthier, and more vibrant. It will also reenforce Israel's ties with the Diaspora.

Strengthening those relations, finally, necessitates an overhaul of the so-called national institutions governing them. The World Zionist Organization, the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemet), Keren Hayesod, and their overarching body, the Jewish Agency were all created to facilitate Israel's establishment. After 1948, however, their original *raison d'être* morphed into promoting and assisting aliya, disseminating Zionist education, and building Diaspora-Israel ties. Over time, unfortunately, these organizations became bloated, often redundant, and, many believe, politically corrupt.

In 2000, for example, the WZO had four departments dealing with the Diaspora and today it has fourteen; its budget, meanwhile, has quadrupled. All of the institutions have education departments that are essentially doing the same thing. Though ostensibly non-political, the organizations have become deeply politicized, their staffs serving as sinecures for senior party members. Widespread among the Israeli public is the sense that the national institutions have long outlived their purpose and that their principal tasks – immigration, forestation, and the development of the periphery – should be assumed by the government.

The Israeli majority is not wrong. There is no reason why the bulk of the land in Israel, representing trillions of shekels in assets, should be controlled by the Keren Kayemet and not the citizens of Israel. And there is no reason why the donations of Diaspora Jews should pay for political appointees, often utterly unqualified, rather than programs that ensure Jewish continuity.

As a new immigrant to Israel, a lone soldier, an emissary to Soviet Jews, a board member of Birthright/Taglit and the Overseas Mission Institute (Machon l'Shlichut), I have had extensive – and overwhelmingly positive – experiences with the Jewish Agency. But I have also seen its wastage and cronyism up close. Still, the baby should not be thrown out with the bathwater. Rather than

eliminating the national institutions, they must be merged and fundamentally reformed.

By 2048, there should be one national institution responsible for encouraging aliya from abroad – something the government cannot do – and enabling interaction between Israel and all Diaspora Jews, irrespective of their religious and ideological backgrounds. Programs such as Birthright/Taglit and Masa, which bring Diaspora youth to Israel, must be expanded, together with greater opportunities for Israeli young people to meet their Diaspora counterparts. By 2048, Israeli and Diaspora Jews must share a sense of common identity and destiny, an awareness of the fact that, regardless of where we live, we belong to a single people.



The State of the Jews

There has always been a question surrounding the title of Theodor Herzl's foundational pamphlet, *Der Judenstaat*. Did the father of Zionism mean the State of the Jews or, rather, the Jewish state? A country with a majority Jewish population in which the Jews could determine their own fate or a nation that was intrinsically, indelibly, Jewish?

The Israel of 2048 must be both. By that date, the sizeable majority of the world's Jews will live here, speak Hebrew, salute a Magen David flag, and follow the Jewish calendar. The problem arises only with the second interpretation. How Jewish does the state have to be in order to be not just *a* but *the* Jewish state? Who defines what is Jewish?

Unlike numerous democratic nation-states in the world – Denmark, for example, or Great Britain – Israel does not have an official religion. And yet, for all practical purposes, Orthodox Judaism and its institutions are recognized and even budgeted

by the state and endowed with far-ranging powers. In life-cycle matters (birth, marriage, divorce, death), conversion, *kashrut* (kosher certification), and immigration these are monopolistic. So, too, is the Orthodox (Haredi) control over Jewish holy places, above all the Kotel. Most Ultra-Orthodox men do not work or serve in the army. Instead, they receive subsidies – paid for by Israeli taxes – to continue studying Torah.

The ramifications of this situation are massive. Though it helps preserve the Jewish people and its traditions, the status quo alienates a great many Israelis from Judaism and its state-sponsored establishment. It creates deepening rifts between Israel and the Diaspora and mitigates Israel's ability to remain economically and technologically competitive. And it demoralizes and weakens the public which is required to shoulder the increasingly large burden, financial and military, of the Haredim.

Twenty years ago, as a fellow at a Zionist thinktank, I engaged in brisk debate over whether the state's relationship with the Haredim posed an opportunity or an existential threat. I argued the latter. It seemed to me then, as it still does now, that the exponential expansion of a population that produced nothing materially but only drained the state, that shared none of its liberal and democratic values and denied children even the most basic modern education, would eventually cause Israel's collapse. The country would neither be able to defend itself nor maintain a viable economy. The sovereignty of its government would not be recognized by a large and rapidly expanding share of the population. Rather than continue to bear this outrageous burden, a great many Israelis would simply leave. "The situation is national suicide," I said.

This slow death, moreover, was funded by the state which paid Orthodox students in the religious schools (*yeshivot*) that left them utterly unprepared to work in the outside world and totally dependent on their rabbis and the government hand-outs they receive.

In response, some of my colleagues countered that the Haredim were not a threat but an opportunity – a highly intelligent and disciplined population which, if smartly and sensitively approached, could make tremendous contributions. Some of their predictions proved correct. More than half of Ultra-Orthodox men are currently employed and growing numbers serve in the IDF. But those statics are misleading. The Haredi birth rate still outstrips the growth of the Haredi work force, and the actual number of Haredi soldiers has been shown to be exaggerated. Haredi employees, moreover, especially women, often work only part-time and earn significantly less than other Israelis. “The Ultra-Orthodox philosophy is that you have to be unemployed in order to study – and that will not change,” said Prof. Nissim Lion of Bar-Ilan University. “Poverty will not affect it, on the contrary – poverty only increases spirituality.” Some 60% of Haredi children live below the poverty line. We are still on route to self-destruction.

That catastrophe must and can be averted. The first step, as mentioned above, is to insist that Haredi schools provide a core curriculum of English, science, and math. A class in civics, inculcating democratic ideas and familiarity with the state, is also crucial. Frameworks must also be made for teaching computer and engineering skills and incentivizing entrepreneurs to make Haredi-friendly workplaces. Alternative modes of national service, not just military, must be found in which the Haredim can serve the state – and their own communities – proudly.

None of this can be accomplished through coercion. Proposed legislation penalizing Haredim and their schools for draft-evasion will surely backfire and result in large-scale unrest and incarceration. Instead, the state must make an historic effort to engage Ultra-Orthodox leaders in a dialogue based on mutual respect and the assurance that the Jewish state has no desire to undermine the Haredi way of life but only to preserve it for future generations through integration into the mainstream.

A far more difficult task involves limiting the powers of the Chief Rabbinate. Once headed by more liberal national-religious rabbis, the institution is now dominated by the Haredim. It refuses to recognize the Jewishness of large numbers of Israeli and Diaspora Jews and rejects the conversions conducted by any rabbis, even the Orthodox, not included on a Haredi list. Unable to wed in Israel, couples of mixed religious backgrounds, as well as those unwilling to undergo a Rabbinate-approved ceremony, get married abroad. Still, divorce is only possible through the Rabbinate. So, too, are burial services and certification for *kashrut*, both of which have been accused of corruption.

The answer lies in breaking this monopoly and opening Jewish life in Israel to other non-Haredi streams. Jewish couples should, for example, be able to choose which form of marriage ceremony – Orthodox, Conservative, Reform – they prefer, just as they can later choose which *mohel*, *dayan*, or any other religious functionary, including *hevreh kaddisha* (burial society). Though civil marriage should remain a goal, it must be approached with sensitivity to the Muslim, Druze, and Christian communities that will oppose it. Civil marriage exists nowhere in the Middle East.

Additionally, the state must set up a national process through which many tens of thousands of Israelis – most of them immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe – can convert in a humane way that also respects Jewish law. It must create dignified spaces for those who do not convert but fall in the defense of the state to be buried with honor. The state must also ensure a proper place for non-Orthodox prayer at the Holy Sites. And the state must take back full control over the immigration process, reviving the original Law of Return and its criteria for determining who is a Jew: a person born of a Jewish mother and who remains a Jew, irrespective of how she or he practices that Judaism.

None of this will be easy. The Haredi control over life-cycle events represents an enormous source of income for that

community. That money, in turn, helps perpetuate the self-defeating system of Haredi dependence on welfare and the rabbis who keep them unskilled. Paternalistic though it may sound, ending the Rabbinite's stranglehold will further compel the Haredim to seek secular education and well-paying work. It will aid them during national crises such as the Coronavirus, which claimed the lives of a disproportionate number of uninformed and misguided Haredim. It will, moreover, help save the state from spiritual and financial breakdown.

This is not in any way to advocate for attempting to alter the Haredi lifestyle or to force anyone committed to it to be less observant. On the contrary, by assuring the sustainability of that community and the state on which it depends, these measures will guarantee a vibrant Haredi future. Having a sizeable section of its population dedicated to study and prayer, often at the price of self-imposed poverty, should be a point of pride for the Jewish state. But it must not come at the cost of the state's very existence.

By working to make Israel more the State of the Jews, Israel will simultaneously make Israel a more Jewish state. It will strengthen itself economically, socially, militarily, and morally. A century after it first came to fruition, Herzl's vision will be achieved.



The Sovereign State

The tragic death of forty-five Jewish worshippers on Mount Meron during the 2021 Lag B’Omer gathering was the result of many factors: political pressure to remove crowd restrictions, police incompetence, inadequate infrastructure. Nobody, it turned out, oversaw the event. Nobody – not the politicians nor the police – dared interfere in what has been essentially an Ultra-Orthodox state-within-a-state that drains resources from Israel but gives nothing back in return; that provides minimal education to its young people and keeps them dependent on a leadership that sees itself as independent from, and more legitimate than, the democratically elected government. The ultimate tragedy of Meron was that it was symptomatic of a far more pervading – and potentially existential – meltdown of Israeli sovereignty.

Sovereignty, as the dictionary defines it, is a “supreme and independent power or authority in government as possessed or claimed by a state.” According to that definition, Israel is not a

sovereign nation. It does not exercise supreme power over large sections of its territory and major segments of its population. Rather, as I wrote in a 2007 *Commentary* article, “Israel is hemorrhaging sovereignty.”

Take, for example, the Negev, accounting for 62% of Israel’s territory. The Bedouin population, once nomadic and now almost entirely sedentary, numbers roughly 230,000, double what it was in 2000. I lived in the Negev for five years and watched as the landscape literally disappeared beneath squatters. This natural increase, the world’s highest, is the result of advanced Israeli care and the virtual elimination of a once-notorious infant mortality rate. It is also the product of the polygamy practiced by nearly one-fifth of all Bedouin males. The tradition is radically anti-feminist and frequently cruel, with many wives purchased like chattel, forced to conduct hard labor, and bear seven children or more. With four wives, a Bedouin male need never work but only collect child subsidies from the government. For this reason, in 1977, the Knesset passed a bill outlawing polygamy and then, for the next forty-five years, ignored it.

By failing to apply its laws, Israel has not only eroded a once-overwhelming Jewish majority in the Negev but also undermined its long-term security. Nearly a third of all the Bedouin live in illegal villages – more than 80,000 structures – which Israel has done relatively little to demolish. Together with authorized towns and cities, these create an almost unbroken swath between Gaza and the Hebron hills, essentially bisecting the Negev.

The immense danger posed by this situation was evident early in 2022, when thousands of Bedouin rioted against the planting of Jewish National Fund trees – a quintessential Zionist project – in the central Negev. Arabic posts claiming the desert belonged to the Bedouin, and calling on them to defend it, proliferated the internet. The government’s plan to connect illegal Bedouin settlements to the electrical grid threatened to

undermine the very notion of Israeli sovereignty and equality before the law.

Such developments would be sufficiently alarming without the twin processes of “Palestinization” and Islamic radicalism that have pervaded the Bedouin community. Taking advantage of Israeli indifference, both Hamas and the PLO have constructed mosques and madrassas throughout the Bedouin communities and provided the teachers, many of them Israeli Arabs from the north, who radicalize Bedouin youth. Thirty years ago, as a reservist serving in Hebron, I entered a Hamas-affiliated religious school only to find it crammed with Bedouin children from the Negev. When asked why they were studying there and not at home, the young boys replied that only there did they received proper schooling and food. It’s scarcely surprising that, according to the Internal Security Service, Bedouin involvement in terrorist attacks such as that which killed four Israelis in Beersheva in March, 2022 is rising.

The solution lies in part with measures I’ve already recommended, among them better educating and integrating the Bedouin into Israeli society. Issuing far greater numbers of building permits for Bedouin will also help, as will a national effort to develop the Negev and encourage Jews to move there (see below). But none of these efforts will succeed unless Israel first and forcibly exerts sovereignty over all its people and its land.

The failure to do so is glaring not only among the Bedouin of the south but also the Arabs of the north. It has long surpassed the Jewish population and in some areas, such as the Lower Galilee, by as much as 25%. Illegal land seizure and construction is rampant as is the depredation of livestock owned by Jews. As recently as 2019, a poll showed that a third of all Arab residents of the north – a third of country’s landmass – supported autonomy from the state.

The center of the country, though, offers the best – and most frightening – example of Israel’s unwillingness to apply its sovereignty over Arab areas. Abu Ghosh will always be remembered

as the Arabic-speaking village that sided with Israel in its War of Independence and which continues to send its young men to serve in the IDF. I've been to funerals in Abu Ghosh for soldiers who fell in battle. No less unique is the geographical position of Abu Ghosh atop a ridge that overlooks Ben-Gurion Airport as well as Highway 1, the major route connecting Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. That high point is now home to many dozens of new houses which are too expensive for the villagers to afford, but which have been purchased by affluent Palestinians holding East Jerusalem residency cards and even by Gazans acting through middlemen. These Palestinians will soon dominate what is arguably the most strategically vital point in the entire state, one that could be used to Israel's great disadvantage in crisis-time. The original residents of Abu Ghosh have repeatedly petitioned Israeli leaders to halt this dangerous process, but without success.

The hemorrhaging of Israeli sovereignty is not confined to Arab communities, as we've seen, but is endemic to Israel's relationship with its Ultra-Orthodox communities. These Haredim, as they are known collectively, account for nearly 13% of Israel's total population, and yet they pay less than a third of the taxes paid by other Israelis. With a Haredi birth rate almost twice that of secular Israelis – by 2048, half of all Israeli schoolchildren will be Haredi – that percentage is doomed to shrink. The country will become economically, if not technologically and militarily, unsustainable.

The state's failure to assert its authority on the Mount Meron festival was adumbrated repeatedly during the Coronavirus crisis. Refusing to follow the government's instructions for fighting the pandemic, obedient to their rabbis instead, thousands of Haredim gathered for prayer, weddings, Torah study, and funerals, rapidly infecting themselves as well as others outside their communities. The authorities hesitated to enforce the lockdown on Haredi institutions, with catastrophic results. Though some 60%

of all Corona-related hospitalizations were Ultra-Orthodox, the entire nation had to be shut down. The cost to the state in terms of medical care and continued unemployment was incalculable. The cost in human life was criminal.

Finally, there can be no durable sovereignty without enforcement and Israel's police force is far from up to the job. Miniscule salaries combined with long workdays (and nights) have contributed to a chronic dearth of policewomen and men. Public confidence in the police, already declining in the Jewish population, has plummeted among the Arabs – with 31% among Jews versus 13% among Arabs. Occupied with fighting terror, especially in Jerusalem, Israeli police often have little time to battle crime. The absence of qualified personnel has led to the police to back off from enforcing anti-squatting and illegal building laws, with disastrous results both in the Galilee and the Negev. The enforcement of the COVID restrictions in Haredi institutions was only partially successful at best. Most egregiously, the yearly murder rate among Israeli Arabs – accounting for 70% of all the country's homicides – has doubled over the past decade, surpassing 100. Police commanders have told the government that they simply lack the manpower to confiscate the 400,000 illegal firearms hidden in Arab communities. Ultimately, the difference between sovereignty and anarchy hinges on Israel's commitment to making police service a viable career choice and to expanding its ranks to include more Arab and possibly even Haredi officers.

For Israel, becoming a truly sovereign state is not merely an aspiration but a matter of survival. Failure to apply our laws and extend our control over all areas and populations will inexorably lead to losing them. The recent success of the municipality and police in stemming illegal building in East Jerusalem proves that this can be done. And we must do it, if we are to celebrate Israel's centennial.



Israel's New Deal

Though a narrow but growing majority of Israeli Arabs now express pride at being Israeli, the overwhelming majority of Jewish Israelis view them as a threat. The perception is reinforced by Israeli Arab leaders, secular and religious, who refuse to recognize the state's legitimacy and openly support terror.

And yet, comprising 21% of Israel's population, Israeli Arabs are integral to Israel's future. They are upwardly mobile and increasingly powerful. Ra'am, an Arab Islamic party, was part of the 2021–2022 government coalition. Arab schoolteachers are, comparatively, more highly certified than their Jewish counterparts and Christian Arabs are on average better educated and more affluent than Israeli Jews. During the Corona crisis, the courageous role fulfilled by Arab physicians and nurses proved crucial. Is there a way, we must ask, for Israeli Arabs to be seen not as a danger but as an opportunity? Can Jewish Israelis ever embrace their Arab neighbors as full-fledged countrywomen and men?

The answer is yes, but only if Israel makes a strategic policy decision that I call The New Deal. Simply put, it means that the state will not merely condemn discrimination and inequality but publicly declare war on it. This means robustly fighting racism in the classroom and workplace, in the media, and in politics. It means promoting Arabic language education in Jewish schools and Hebrew language instruction in Arab schools while integrating the faculties of both. It means enforcing the law and vastly increasing the police presence in Arab communities, removing the guns from the hands of criminals, and fighting the drug trade. It means investing in infrastructure in Arab cities and villages, building additional schools and introducing industry, and providing the financial wherewithal for thriving small businesses. It means setting as a national goal the full social, economic, and educational integration of Israeli Arabs into mainstream Israeli society by 2048.

But that is only one side of the New Deal. The other requires Israeli Arabs to accept their minority role in a Jewish nation-state and view themselves as citizens of that state not only with equal rights but duties. It does not mean that Israeli Arabs have to give up their Palestinian identity and their right to express solidarity with Palestinians throughout the Middle East – no more than an American Jew has to surrender love for Israel in order to be loyally American. Yet it does mean condemning terror, supporting Israel's efforts to defend itself, and rejecting anti-Israeli boycotts. It means obeying Israeli laws outlawing polygamy, smuggling, and unauthorized building.

Becoming fully Israeli also means national service. This can begin with service within the Arab community itself, enhancing security and the quality of life, but military roles should not be ruled out. The old excuse that Arabs cannot be asked to fight Arabs ended with the Arab Spring. There is no reason why Israeli Arabs cannot defend their state against ISIS, Syria, or Iran. British Jews salute the Union Jack that has not only one but three crosses on

it and historically have fought and died for that flag. Israeli Arabs can feel the same way toward the Magen David.

The New Deal is, in fact, already happening and need only be accelerated. In contrast to the past, when Israeli Arabs protested against the presence of police in their villages, now they protest in favor of a greater police presence. And, as the recent elections showed, Arab politicians are harnessing their newfound power not to delegitimize the system but to influence it. These trends offer opportunities that must not be missed and which, if catalyzed by policy, can make Israel 2048 a truly cohesive state.



All Israelis Are Mutually Responsible

K*ol Yisrael arevim ze b'ze* – the talmudic injunction for all Jews to assume responsibility for their co-religionists' welfare. It is a powerful concept which, when translated into sovereign terms, enjoins all Israelis to take responsibility for their fellow citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

This principle, enshrined in Israel's national health-care system, ideally should apply to society as a whole. Challenging this effort, though, is Israel's transformation from a largely agrarian state with relatively little stratification into a high-tech powerhouse with one of the world's widest social gaps. A mere 20% of the population now pays 92% of the country's taxes, and that percentage is dwindling. Nearly a million and a half children now live beneath the poverty line in Israel.

This is an impossible situation for a Jewish state. While free market capitalism is essential for expanding Israel's economic power – and its military strength – it must be balanced with social policies and safety nets for those unable to experience the new Israeli dream. In the Jewish state, one cannot simply step over the homeless in the street.

Achieving that balance will require Israel, on the one hand, to continue deregulating and eliminating the bureaucracy that stunts economic growth, while on the other, earmarking part of those profits to provide development opportunities for all. This will include building additional high-tech centers outside of Greater Tel Aviv and establishing technical vocational schools (see below). It will also necessitate revising the payment of subsidies to large families – Jewish and Arab – that relieve the parents of these families of the need to work. Muslim women and Ultra-Orthodox men must be incentivized and trained to enter the workforce (see below) and guaranteed a livable minimum wage.

Israel must not become a welfare state but neither can it be a heartless state. Ultimately, the vision of a thriving yet humane Israel can only be achieved by planning now for our economic, educational, and health-care future.

The State of the Book

The generation that built Israel made education a priority. With drastically limited budgets, it created seven world-class universities and research institutions. Today, with a GDP several times larger than it was fifty years ago and a population that has more than tripled, Israel's education system is failing to keep pace with the state's expansion and falling below many of the standards of developing countries.

While studies show that Israel is the third-most educated state in the world, with nearly half the population acquiring some level of adult education, the educational level of the general population has been plummeting. Israel is now ranked 39th in the world in the sciences and math. And while Israel exceeds the OECD average for the percentage of GDP spent on education and for the number of children in pre-school programs, it falls far below OECD standards in its per capita expenditure for education, teachers' salaries, and the number of students per classroom. The state